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The Formation of Self-concept and its Changes in the Context of Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor

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Abstract

This paper deals with the formation of self-concept of an individual and its changes in the context of Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor. It focuses on the impact of negative self-concept on personal life of the individual, interpersonal relationships and studying. The objective is to explore the potential of Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor in the area of positive changes of self-concept. The study showed the importance of ideal figures, which provide the saturation of the individual's basic developmental needs which were not fulfilled in his/her childhood. The individual acquires a new positive experience (memory), which remains in his/her mind as an alternative influencing his/her future life.

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1. 1. Theory background

We often meet students who do not accept themselves, they have low self-confidence and feelings of inferiority and lack of control over their lives. They regard partial failures (often stimulated by the subconscious) as the confirmation of their subjective feeling of general failure in personal and study life. The interviews with them reveal that they have very similar experience – insufficient support and trust in their abilities and skills, inadequate treatment (mental or physical violence) of themselves or the members of their families on the part of their relatives, lack of recognition and respect. This makes them put themselves in the role of the victim, outsider, someone unworthy of recognition, respect or acceptance of schoolmates or a partner. The study success is affected by a number of cognitive, emotional and social factors (Haviger, 2011). This is generally called the negative self-concept (Blatný & Plháková, 2003). The above-described situation has a negative impact on success at school – repeated failure to arrive on the day of examination, anxiety and fear of the exam, postponement of study duties,

prolonged time of study etc. Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor provides original methods of dealing with negative self-concept – a new experience, satisfaction of basic developmental needs, which the parents failed to saturate and compensation of the resultant deficits negatively affecting the life of the individual (Pesso, Boyden, & Vrtbovská, 2009).

Blatný (in Blatný & Plháková, 2003, pp. 299-300) defines self-concept as: “the complex of images and evaluative judgements which a person makes concerning himself/herself”. Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (in Blatný & Plháková, 2003) understand self-concept as the perception of oneself formed through the experience with the environment and influenced mainly by the environment and the significant others. In this sense it concerns in the specific type of implicit theories (Havigerová, 2012).

As Blatný explains, an important aspect of self-concept is its integrity and harmony, which condition the maintenance of mental well-being. The need for consistent image of oneself is so important that people are willing to accept negative information about them if it corresponds with their self-concept. (Blatný & Plháková, 2003)

With respect to its objectives, the study is based on Higgins’ theory of self-guides and self-discrepancy theory. Higgins’ self-discrepancy theory offers an interesting concept of the representations of the self, organized based on the cognitive dimensions: domains of the self and standpoints of the self. The three domains of the self-include the actual, the ideal and the ought. Actual self represents what the individual believes s/he possesses, ideal self-comprises what the individual (or someone else) would like to possess (aspirations, hopes, wishes) and ought represents the attributes that the individual (or someone else) believes s/he should have (tasks, duties, responsibility...). There are two standpoints – one’s own standpoint and the standpoint of a significant other. According to Higgins, actual self-corresponds with the traditional term self-concept. Self-guides – internalized standards representing ideal and ought self, which function as motives of behaviour. Discrepancy between actual and ideal self from one’s own perspective leads to the absence of positive judgements of oneself, depressive emotions and frustration. Discrepancy between ideal and actual self from the standpoint of a significant other provokes depressive emotions as well – e.g. despondency, shame and fear of the loss of love and respect of others. A discrepancy between one’s own actual self and one’s own formulation of ought self-results in negative judgements of oneself and susceptibility to states of agitation – feelings of guilt, uneasiness, self-contempt... It is also connected with feelings of moral insufficiency. Discrepancy between one’s own actual self and ought self from the standpoint of a significant other leads to states of agitation – e.g. anxiety, feelings of threat – and it is also connected with fear of punishment (Blatný & Plháková, 2003; Higgins, 1987).

Assuming the perspective of Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor (henceforth PBSP) we treat the deficits in basic developmental needs here. These include the needs of place, nurturance, support, protection and limits. Deficit in the need for place is a result of being refused by the first carer – the individual desires to belong somewhere but s/he cannot find his/her place. The consequences of a lack of saturation are the dependence on the presence and actions of another, feelings of inner emptiness and the inability to express one’s needs. Insufficient support leads to feelings of uncertainty, unease, weak self-confidence and self-respect and the tendency to underestimate oneself, feeling weak and incompetent. A deficit in protection brings the feelings of helplessness, the individual is oversensitive, vulnerable and full of anxiety. Insufficient limits cause the tendency towards destructivity and the inability to differentiate between reality and fantasy (Pesso, Boyden, & Vrtbovská, 2009).

We are convinced that an individual with negative self-concept often lacks control over the events in his/her life and feels unable to control it. We further assume that there is a lack of positive judgements concerning oneself accompanied by symptoms of depression etc. We suppose that this is connected with deficits in basic developmental needs and that the approach PBSP contributes to positive changes of self-concept, consequently helping to overcome difficulties with study.

2. Research Questions

- What is the influence of negative self-concept on personal and study life?
- What is the potential of PBSP to change negative self-concept?

3. Research Methods:

Given the objectives of the study it was decided to employ the qualitative research strategy, specifically the narrative approach. (Hendl, 2008; Mioviský, 2006) Data were obtained using the method of narrative interview. The respondents' stories were first analysed using the narrative reconstruction. The narrative reconstruction followed these topics: Life issues, Representation of actions, Plots, Values and beliefs, Reflexion and perspective, The images of oneself and the others (Čermák, 2002; Chrz, 2004; Mioviský, 2006). A connection between the results of narrative reconstruction, the theory of self-guides, the self-discrepancy theory and deficits in basic developmental needs were described. The final stage consisted in exploring the relations with the use of PBSP. Ten respondents were included in our research. This study presents the analysis of the story of a selected client. The reason of the selection was the combination of deficits in the developmental needs, developmental trauma (especially with the emphasis on the topic of abuse) and related issues in personal life and learning difficulties.

4. Solution and Results

The objective of the study is to determine the extent of influence of negative self-concept on personal and study life of an individual. Secondary objectives include the identification of discrepancies between actual self and self-guides of the respondents and the search for connections with deficits in basic developmental needs. The related aim is to describe which elements and principles of PBSP affect self-concept in a positive way. Two research questions were appointed - What is the influence of negative self-concept on personal and study life? What is the potential of PBSP to change negative self-concept?

In this part we introduce the most important topics of the story of respondent 1. Then we demonstrate the analysis of the story according to the categories of narrative reconstruction.

4.1. The story of respondent 1

The father of the respondent repeatedly attacked her mother, both physically according to and mentally. The respondent has two brothers, who sexually abused her for several years. At present, she lives alone and she occasionally visits her home. She is studying at the university and she encounters problems with concentration and communication with her fellow students.

4.2. The analysis of the story of respondent 1 according to the categories of narrative reconstruction

- *Life issues* – the student comes because of study difficulties, during the first session, she speaks about postponing of an exam, loss of energy to study and the impossibility to fit into the study group (she does not feel good there, she feels as if no one listens to her). We get to other topics very soon, first of all, we talk about domestic violence between partners (the father towards the mother of the student), sexual abuse of the students on the part of her brothers, rejection and humiliation, mainly on the part of the father and humiliation on the part of the brothers because of “overweight”.
- *Representation of actions* – initially, the student tried to face her brothers on her own, later she asked her mother for help. As the brothers did not change their behaviour despite having been warned, the student gradually became more passive, feeling no support to rely on. Her grades at school became worse. She reacted to her father's treatment of her mother mostly passively, fearing of making the situation even worse. She speaks about “surviving” primary school, she passed the entrance exam at grammar school and after graduation she entered the university. She deliberately chose a school far away from her home in order to have peace.
- *Plots* – we may see the main plot in the experience with abuse on the part of the relatives and the fact that the adults (parents) were unable to prevent it. Thus, the student repeatedly experienced the feeling that home is not secure, it is not a good place and there is no support for her. She also lacked the limits of behaviour - this concerned her brothers and father but also her own inability to perceive limits in general, which made her repeatedly put herself into dangerous situations without knowing it. Another crucial plot is her leaving home

and the beginning of her university studies.

- *Values and beliefs* – it is the family which the respondent considers the greatest value. She is determined to create a happy family providing safety for both partners and the children.
- *Reflexion and perspective* – the students regards the family where the violence happened as a place full of uncertainty. Thinking about her experience with hindsight, she blames her mother for not having prevented her brother's behaviour and her father for treating her mother harshly and attacking her physically. She is not angry with her brothers, however, she wants them to apologize, and she needs to hear that they are sorry.
- *Images of oneself and the others* – she perceives herself as incompetent person with no energy and ideas and sometimes deserving reprobation, fat and stupid. Sometimes, she thinks of herself as someone perverse (mainly in relation to dreams and fantasies). She regards her father as an aggressor and a weakling, who humiliates others and knows no solution of problems but violence and anger. She believes her elder brother to be a good father of his child and a man who tries to live a good life. She considers her younger brother irresponsible and her mother a victim.

Discrepancy between actual self and self-guides – Discrepancy between one's own actual self and one's own formulation of ought – self results (in negative judgements of self – feelings of guilt, self-contempt etc.). In the case of our respondent we found: at present, the respondents regards herself as incompetent, stupid, slow, unattractive, unsuccessful in study and relationships. Discrepancy between ideal and actual self from the standpoint of significant other (f. e. shame, fear of the loss of love and a respect of others) can be seen in our respondent's lacking the support of the significant others. Both her father and her brothers humiliated her, the actions of her brothers were a great hurt to her. She speaks about her schoolmates' disinterest and unwillingness to accept her. She generally does not feel accepted by the others and she blames herself for it. She thinks that her family expects her not to talk about what happened and to be independent and successful. She believes that other people require her to be more determined, expressive, to take part in common activities but it may be too late. That is why she experiences hopelessness, futility and fears doing something wrong.

Deficits in basic developmental needs - We can speak about deficits in all of the five basic needs. Given the gravity of the respondent's case, we can even describe it as a complex developmental trauma (Herman, 1997; Levine, 1997; Rothschild, 2000). Security and a good place in the family were completely missing for several years. That is why the students repeatedly fail to find a good place in life. She feels unable to change her situation. There was also a serious lack of support on the part of her father, her mother's support was limited by the situation in the family. The respondent suffers from the feelings of loss of self-respect, she believes herself incompetent and lacks self-confidence. The lack of nurturance resulted in the experience of inner emptiness. Insufficient limits, mainly concerning the behaviour of men in her family, caused her lowered ability to recognize dangerous situations and her repeated exposure to such situations.

The use of PBSP to change the self-concept – first of all, the respondent was given space to speak and the mechanisms of deficits in basic needs and the theory of trauma were explained to her. Initially, she was willing to discuss the deficits in basic needs in general, using an image of a ten year old girl as a means of realizing what she lacked and what she needed to experience and saturate on the part of her parents. After several months, she became more able to focus directly on herself, perceive her own needs which were not satisfied and realize what she would have needed to experience and to hear from the ideal parents and brothers. She felt a great relief experiencing a situation when the ideal mother told her that she would protect her and ensure her safety. She ceased to blame her real mother and began to feel more sympathy to her. Another strong experience which brought her a great relief was the symbolic encounter and apology of the ideal brothers. Working with ideal figures, she gradually became more confident, she began to accept herself more and stopped to fear to be creative and be herself. She also understood safe limits. This reduced her anxiety and the feelings of hopelessness, she began to feel to be able to breathe and look around her again. She became more and more involved in common activities with schoolmates and she assumed some tasks beneficial for the whole study group and fulfilled them without difficulties. She concentrated more during exams and passed them successfully. She began to wear more colourful clothes, she does not fear to be seen anymore, she does not need to be invisible. She described herself as more happy and confident and she accepts herself more and she likes some "things" about herself. She integrated the past experience as a part

of herself and it does not hurt her anymore.

5. Findings

Following our objective, we focused on the search for connections between the discrepancies in self-concept and self-guides in the stories of the respondents. Once more, we intended to point out the influence of relationships in primary family on the individual's self-concept, which later affects personal life and damages the competence to study. We agree with e.g. Žumárová, who stresses the necessity of emotional satisfaction on the part of the parents and good preparation of the child for the life in society (Žumárová, 2012). We focused on university students who lived in families where they encountered inadequate behaviour of relatives (e.g. domestic violence, battering, abuse...) We analysed their life stories and examined the formation of self-concept and the influence of negative self-concept on their lives, including interpersonal relationships and study. Consequently, we tried to identify the basic elements and principles of PBSP which were used in the counselling and therapeutic processes and contributed to the gradual positive changes in self-concept.

The research shows that an element of PBSP which definitely has the potential to change self-concept is the so-called ideal figures, which provide the experience of the adequate satisfaction of basic needs on symbolic level. The interaction with the ideal relatives has a form of an experience on the emotional, physical and cognitive level.

Pesso, Boyden and Vrtbovská explain that on the neurobiological level, the new experience is integrated as alternative records in the implicit emotional and the explicit procedural memory. Thus, the symbolic experience becomes equivalent to the real experience of the individual's personal history (Pesso, Boyden, & Vrtbovská, 2009).

This article reports results of the project Specific research realized under the name "The Use of Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor in the Work with Victims (with an Accent to Victims of Domestic Violence)" at the Faculty of Education at the University of Hradec Králové in 2013.

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